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Hush-Hush NSA Covers Tracks With a Crayon

The recent conviction of Geoffrey Prime, a British communications specialist who passed secret information to the Kremlin, has made our own intelligence agencies understandably nervous. But the case of Ed Weimer, a 15-year employee of the super-secret National Security Agency, suggests that the government may be expending its efforts in the wrong direction.

While on a secret mission to Vietnam in 1974, Weimer met and fell in love with a Vietnamese woman. His NSA bosses, fearful that Weimer's fiancée might be a spy, immediately ordered him home.

So far, so good. It's understandable that a hush-hush agency like the NSA would worry about the romantic liaison of one of its employees.

But the NSA went beyond the call of duty to protect Weimer from himself. The agency thwarted every effort he made to have his fiancée evacuated from Vietnam and join him in the United States, where she would be harmless even if she were indeed a communist agent—which Weimer stoutly denies.

Eventually, Weimer's fiancée man-

aged to escape from Vietnam to France. When she was safely out of her homeland, Weimer filed suit against the NSA for damage to his career. He had been forced out of the intelligence agency because of his persistence in trying to rescue the woman he loved.

While gathering evidence for his lawsuit, Weimer found that U.S. intelligence agencies had helped smuggle friends of CIA and other NSA agents out of Vietnam. He also uncovered serious security violations by NSA officials.

When he tried to prosecute his case against the NSA, Weimer concluded that agency officials were far more interested in covering up their actions than in rectifying his shabby treatment—or protecting security.

One trick the agency resorted to was stamping "Top Secret" on any documents that would prove embarrassing to the NSA. Its attorneys also succeeded in having the entire case put under court seal, thereby preventing any public scrutiny of Weimer's charges.

What really appalled Weimer, though, was that the NSA gave him his security file, which contained confidential information about his career. With millions of dollars' worth of super-sophisticated intelligence devices at their disposal, NSA officials used a simple crayon to cross through some of the material.

My associate Donald Goldberg

has seen the file. Clearly visible were the names of more than a dozen NSA agents who have served in sensitive positions abroad and a description of an extremely sensitive intelligence-gathering technique used by the agency. Their disclosure would be a serious breach of security.

Weimer also charges he was routinely shown highly classified NSA documents for which he had not been given a security clearance. In other words, the intelligence agency gave secret information to an employee it apparently feared had been compromised by his personal attachment to a foreigner the agency thought might be a spy.

In a further irony, Weimer's legal case was dismissed by a federal judge because he didn't file the suit within the statute of limitations. The reason he didn't file, of course, was that he was afraid the communist government of Vietnam would retaliate against the fiancée of an American spy. By being a good soldier and by trying to protect his fiancée, Weimer has wound up without a legal leg to stand on.

Footnote: NSA had no comment.

Lid Coming Off?: If Congress lets the latest pay cap expire, top-level Executive Branch officials will get automatic raises of 20 to 27 percent. This would put some of their annual salaries above \$70,000, and insiders suspect that members of Congress aren't about to let unelected bureaucrats make more than they do.